REPORT OF THE TRAILS INVENTORY TEAM

The first mountain-wide trail inventory on public lands in the Santa Monica Mountains and Conejo Valley is being coordinated by this action team. Students, community volunteers and agency staff are working together to collect information about trail locations and various trail features. This information will assist agencies and volunteers with trail planning and maintenance activities. The project will also result in the creation of a regional trail map available to the public in Summer 1997.

Background

The Santa Monica Mountains and adjacent Conejo Valley feature more than 450 miles of recreation trails open to the public. Many of these trails are old ranch, utility and fire roads that were inherited by public agencies as land was acquired. Land managers have incrementally added to this trail system over the last several decades. The result is an extensive trail network that has never been inventoried on a regional scale.

In addition, while excellent trail maps are available to the public, visitors and agency staff must obtain several maps at different scales and formats to have complete trail coverage of the entire 225,000-acre Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area zone. The accuracy of these maps varies widely.

Recent developments in digital mapping technology have made it possible to cost-effectively create and maintain an accurate trail database, which can be used to easily produce and update trail maps and store critical information for management needs.

Purpose

The goal of this action team is to field inventory and map public trails in the Santa Monica Mountains and adjacent Conejo Valley. This project will benefit trail users and agencies, and further the goal of environmental protection, by:

- creating one, visitor-friendly regional trail map that can be easily updated;
- producing a digital base map that can be used for future trail and open space planning efforts;
- identifying unauthorized trails or trails that should be closed and restored to protect sensitive areas;
- generating a database of trail-related facilities in need of cyclic repair or replacement, such as water
- bars, culverts, picnic tables, footbridges, steps and retaining walls.

Process

Trails were inventoried by student interns, volunteers and staff from various agencies using satellite communications equipment known as Global Position Systems (GPS). Training classes were offered by the National Park Service (NPS), in cooperation with the California Department of Parks and Recreation,

for anyone desiring to participate in the project.

Throughout the SMMART process, participants traveled the mountains by foot, bicycle, or vehicle with hand-held GPS units and recorded trail location data transmitted from orbiting satellites. Data files recorded in the field were downloaded to computers at the offices of the NPS, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. The data was then mapped and displayed by the NPS using a state-of-the-art Geographic Information System.

Participants also recorded information about trail tread, trail width, sign locations, and trail maintenance items using either the hand-held GPS unit or field notes.

A preliminary draft of a trail map for each park site was then generated. Interviews with field rangers and agency personnel were conducted to "proof' the maps, note corrections, and add information about the locations of visitor parking lots and trailheads, campground facilities, drinking water, visitor centers, ranger stations, picnic areas, and points of interest.

The preliminary draft maps are currently being edited to incorporate the changes and additions made during the field interviews. In addition, volunteers and agency staff are currently working to inventory trail segments that were identified as missing from the original inventory. Map 1 shows the Trails Inventory as of July, 1997.

Implementation Recommendations

I-1. Agencies should meet annually and share resources to update the GIS trail map and database. This will ensure that the map is kept current for planning, maintenance and visitor information purposes.

Participants and Contributors

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